

Orwell: the prediction of decaying language

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“ He knew when language was being bloodied, syntax corrupted, meaning crushed →→→→→- made to do the opposite of what, morally, it is supposed to do - to lie, to screen, to confuse and anger and hypnotize.

” Christopher Hitchens grasped the prophecy that famous author, George Orwell, had set out in his novel 1984. In this book, the use of language helped the Party to change what happened in the past, control what went on in the present, and make the chance of rebellion in the future unattainable. With the destruction of language used in this story, Orwell was foretelling what possible outcomes for the future could be. In a recent political cartoon, Orwell is depicted looking down from heaven while drinking a cup of tea with the caption “ I hate to say I told you so...” Orwell’s prophecy of language collapsing and falling from its once high standing is now the reality of slang and abbreviations. In 1984, the Party started to generate an alternative language developing from the pre-existing one. Words and phrases were being simplified, making it easier for the Party to control society by narrowing the people’s range of thought (Orwell 55).

This was called Newspeak. One of the characters, Syme, introduces this topic when he talks about his job of rewriting the Newspeak Dictionary: We’re getting the language into its final shape - the shape it’s going to have when nobody speaks anything else. When we’re finished with it, people like you will have to learn it all over again. You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We’re cutting the language down to the bone.

(Orwell 53-54) Winston uses this type of writing at work although he is more familiar with Oldspeak, the normal unchanged language. The destruction of language then limits the amount of thought therefore making it easier for the Party to control without any sort of rebellion. It seems the Party is trying to take the intelligence out of people by making language simple and short. In daily language, the use of technology has begun to be the driving force of destruction. From kids to adults, cell phones and social networks are being used on a regular basis.

When sending “ texts” or emails the use of abbreviations, short forms, or slang are a constant occurrence. Jonathon Crossfield touches on this topic in one of his many articles: Twitter, SMS, instant messaging...all are ephemeral and instantaneous forms of writing. The idea is transmitted to the world in seconds as we use the fewest number of characters to create the message and hit enter before there has been any chance to review and correct.

(Crossfield) People are even substituting words altogether with pictures.

Larry Tauton brings forth this point in his article “ A Failure to Communicate: Technology & the Destruction of Language”. He states, “ Then came text messaging and with it, a further dumbing-down of the language with cute abbreviations and “ emoticons” to depict our moods” (Tauton). It has taken centuries for human diction to be raised to such a high level but now people are using pictures to show emotions. Have people gone back to cave man ways? People daily are shortening here, cutting there, and eliminating a huge chunk of language. These habits while using technology are causing language to be depleted of its profound meaning. George Orwell’s insight of the future was very accurate when talking about the destruction of language.

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His novel illustrates what a governing body could accomplish if citizens do not hold on to the precious speech that is given. The laziness of people could cause a form of Newspeak to enter the Twenty-First Century. If this were to happen, George Orwell would have a lot more to say than, "I hate to say I told you so."